THE NAMING COMMISSION RECOMMENDS

Fort Walker

As the new name for Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia

When civil war engulfed the United States, **Dr. Mary Edwards Walker** knew exactly where she belonged. Born to a family favoring equality and already a successful surgeon, she never doubted that – as a skilled medical expert and American patriot – she should serve on the front lines of battle, working to save the soldiers who were fighting to save the nation. Getting to that position, however, took an extraordinary combination of professional excellence, personal endurance, and powerful persistence.

Born in upstate New York in 1832, Mary Walker came from a family committed to furthering full equality between the sexes and amongst races. She embarked on a career in medicine, earning her medical degree at the age of 22 from Syracuse University and beginning a career in private practice. By the start of the Civil War, the 28-year-old Walker had already emerged as a skilled surgeon and strong abolitionist and advocate of women's rights and equality.

During the early years of the war, Walker attempted several times to serve as a surgeon for the United States. Facing discrimination due to her sex, and refusing to work as a nurse because of her qualifications, Walker instead chose to support the United States as a volunteer. Early in the war, she worked for free, treating patients in the temporary hospitals set up around Washington, D.C.. She also organized the Women's Relief Organization, a group that facilitated and supported visits by family members to wounded soldiers. As the war moved southward into Virginia in 1862, Mary Walker did as well, treating wounded soldiers in field hospitals near the front lines after the carnage at Fredericksburg.

After repeatedly demonstrating her skill, service, and dedication, she earned the esteem of some within the Army. After transferring to the Western Theater of the war, she was officially hired by General George Thomas in 1863, becoming the first female surgeon in Army history, contracted at a salary commensurate to a Captain's pay. Attached to an Ohio regiment in the Army of the Cumberland, she became known for her compassion as well as her skill. In the contested borders of Tennessee and Kentucky, she frequently crossed lines to treat the sick and wounded regardless of affiliation. Indeed, it was on one such occasion in 1864 – when Walker stayed behind to treat wounded soldiers after the main army had moved on – that Confederates arrested her as a spy and imprisoned her in Richmond for four months. Freed via a prisoner exchange, Dr. Walker continued to serve, spending the final months of the war caring for women and orphans impacted by the destruction of war.

Upon the United States' victory, many male soldiers and surgeons saw their service commended by brevet promotions to higher ranks that symbolized their status and sacrifice. As a woman and as a civilian contractor, however, Dr. Walker's proposed brevet was rejected. Determined to honor her service and commitment to the cause, Gen. William T. Sherman and Gen. George Thomas petitioned that she receive the Medal of Honor. Commending how she "devoted herself with much patriotic zeal to the sick and wounded soldiers, both in the field and hospitals, to the detriment of her own health," the President readily agreed. In November 1865, Walker received the Medal of Honor so that "an honorable recognition of her services and sufferings should be made."

Proud of her service and committed to the causes of equality for which she served, Mary Walker continued to wear the medal everyday thereafter, including through five decades of campaigning for women's equality and women's rights. Sometimes derided, detained, or arrested for her reformist politics and style of dress, Dr. Walker continued to push for a fully equal society. As she told the court on one such occasion, she would forever defend her right to "dress as I please in free America, on whose tented fields I have served for four years in the cause of human freedom."

Dr. Mary Walker's service to the nation, perseverance over significant obstacles based on her gender, and lifelong fight for equality serve as an example and inspiration for all Americans. Her career also honors the civilian contractors, medical professionals, female veterans, and women volunteers who have served throughout our history, and who continue to serve our nation in the cause of human freedom.